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Eternal Salvation the only End
and Design of Religion.

I N A
SERMON,

Preached at the
PARISH-CHURCH

O F
St. Warburgh, DUBLIN;

On Sunday, October 3; 1714.

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Parish, and Chancellor of the Cathedral
Church of St. PATRICK.

Published for the better Information of those to
whom it has been much Misrepresented.

*Charity suffereth long and is kind. Charity envieth not—
doth not behave it self unseemly— is not easily pro-
voked— thinketh no evil— Beareth all things, be-
lieveth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all
things, 1 Cor. 13. 4, &c.*

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THis Discourse has no Dependence, as to the Argument of it, upon that which was preached before it on the same Text : And therefore I publish it alone by it self, only to put a Stop to the false and altogether groundless Reports that have been spread abroad of it.



Edw. Synge.

*Eternal Salvation the only End and Design
of Religion.*

MATTH. XIX. xvi.

And behold one came and said unto him, Good Master, What good Thing shall I do, that I may have Eternal Life?

IN a former Discourse upon these Words, as a Ground-work for what I should think proper to draw from the whole Story, of which my Text is the Beginning, I noted unto you, that the Person who put this Question to our blessed Saviour, was a young Man, a rich Man, and that he came at first with a sincere Design to be informed: Which having premised, the first Observation which I drew from the Text was this:

That even in the time of Youth, Health and Prosperity, we ought to be very careful, and much concerned about our eternal Salvation. And having briefly repeated what before I had more largely discoursed upon this Point (with a Repetition of which I will not trouble the Reader) I come now to a Second Observation from the Words which is this:

That the only End and Design which each Man ought to propose to himself in his Religion, is the attainment of Everlasting Life, or Eternal Salvation, as we usually express it: Which I intend in this Discourse to handle.

At the time of our Saviour's being upon the Earth, the Jewish Church was divided into two grand Parties; namely, the Pharisees and the Sadducees: And by the

Circumstances of the Story, it is more than probable, that this young Man was one of the Pharisees. At the same time also the Jewish Doctors gave themselves a Liberty of advancing diverse Opinions, and introducing several Practices, under the Name of *Traditions*, that were not warranted by the Word of God. Now the young Man in my Text does not desire to be instructed how he may dispute with Learning or Subtily upon the several Controversies which then were very commonly debated, or how he might confound or get the Victory over the opposite Party when at any time he should engage in Disputation with them: No! His Salvation was what alone possesseth his Thoughts; nor did he on this Occasion set a Value upon any thing that did not conduce unto it: And coming to our blessed Lord as to a Guide in Religion; all the Questions that could on that account be put unto him, he thought to be sufficiently comprehended under this one, *What good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?* And in like manner the Jailor at *Philippi*, being fully convinced by the miraculous Earthquake, which shook the Foundations and opened all the Doors of the Prison, that *Paul* and *Silas* were the true Servants and Messengers of God; he had no other Question to put to them but this one, to the very same Purpose with my Text; *Sirs, what must I do to be saved?* Acts 16. 30.

If there be a Necessity of any Proof in a Matter that of it self seems so very plain; For the better Confirmation of this Point, we may have recourse to the Two following Considerations.

First, That this, and none other, is the main End and grand Motive that is proposed to us by God himself.

What God is pleased to lay before us as the End and Design of our embracing Religion, ought accordingly to be received and entertained by us. Let us then have recourse to the Holy Scriptures, and there enquire with what Design our Saviour came to teach Religion; and with what View we are required to embrace it.

Whereas

Whereas Mankind partly by their original Corruption, and more by their actual Transgressions, were become *Children of Wrath*, and unqualified for that Eternal Happiness for which they were at first created; the very Business of our Saviour into the World was to shew and bring them back into the Way of Salvation, or, *to save that which was lost*, as he himself expresses it, *Matt. 18.*

11. And when he sends his Apostles abroad to preach the Gospel, this is the only Motive that he gives them whereby to bring Men over to embrace it: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*, *Mark 16. 16.* And to the same Purpose he tells us, *John 3. 16.* That God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son: For what End and Purpose? Why, as it immediately follows, *That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* And in the Prayer which he makes unto his heavenly Father, he has left it upon Record for our Support and Comfort, that he had the power to give eternal life to as many as God had given him, *John 17. 2.*

Many more Passages of holy Scripture might be added to these, if in so plain a Case there were any Necessity for it; but instead thereof I proceed to a second Consideration whereby this same Point is established; and that is,

That the Prospect of eternal Salvation is the only thing sufficient to encourage and support a good Man under all the Difficulties which a religious course of Life may, and often does in this World, expose him to.

In every work which a prudent Man undertakes, the End he proposes to himself ought always to counter-balance whatever Trouble or Difficulty may probably be foreseen or apprehended to be in the Work it self. Now in the strict Profession and Practice of Religion, there are many Difficulties and Hardships very often to be encountered: We must strive and struggle with our unruly Lusts and Passions, arm our selves against all the alluring Temptations of the World and wicked Men, despise the Danger that often threatens, and bear with

Patience the Evil which sometimes falls upon a Man for the doing of his Duty: We must continually watch and be upon our Guard against all the Wiles and Devices of Satan; and, to say all in one word, we must be ready to lay down even Life it self, if God should call us to it, for the sake of our Duty and a good Conscience.

Now what View, Prospect, or Consideration is there that can support a Man's Mind, and bear him up with Courage against all these Things that are so uneasy, and some of them even terrible to our very Nature? Honour and Credit, Health, Wealth and Prosperity are sometimes indeed in this World a Part of the Reward of Vertue and Piety: But these and all other Things on this side the Grave are very uncertain: Or if they were not so; yet how can any bare Temporal Thing whatsoever be a sufficient Motive to any Man to lay down his Life even in the best Cause; when he knows that Death must wholly deprive him of what is so proposed to him as a Reward?

But if once a Man becomes strongly possess'd with this Truth, that there really is such a Thing as Eternal Happiness, and that Religion is the sure and only way to obtain it; This will make him despise all Difficulties that give him Opposition in his Passage to it; Let Troubles and Persecutions fall never so heavy upon him; yet if it be for the sake of God and a good Conscience; He will Comfort himself with this, that *our light Affliction, which is but for a Moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory*, 2 Cor. 4. 17. And keeping close to his Duty even under the greatest Hardships that may befall him for it, He will reckon, with St. Paul, *That the Sufferings of this present Time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory which shall be revealed in us*, Rom. 8. 18.

And thus from these Two Considerations, I think it fully appears that Eternal Salvation is the only End and Design that a Man ought to propose to himself in his Religion: Because this is the very End that God has

set

set before us ; And this is the only Consideration that can effectually support us under all the Hardships and Difficulties which our Duty obliges us to bear or encounter.

And indeed the Truth of this Observation is so very certain and evident, that no Man who has a Sense of any Religion whatsoever, will dare to deny it, if the Question be put home to him. Ask a Protestant or Papist, or any Man who professes to serve and fear God, for what End he so does ; and he will tell you that it is because he hopes to be thereby everlastingly saved. And ask him farther whether he would continue in that Profession of which he is, if he did not believe that he shall be saved in and by it ; and he will readily tell you he would not : Both which together are as plain an Acknowledgment as well can be, that the only End that every Man proposes, or at least ought to propose in his Religion, is his everlasting Salvation : Which was the Observation but now drawn from the Text.

From this Doctrine, thus established, several Inferences of great Moment and Importance may very clearly be drawn.

As first ; From hence we may learn what is the only View or Design with which every *Religious Action* ought to be performed.

These Actions are of several Sorts, namely some immediately respecting God alone ; As Prayer and Praise, receiving the Holy Communion, and drawing nigh unto him in any of his Ordinances : Others having relation to our Neighbour ; as Justice, Truth, Mercy, Charity ; others again most immediately terminating upon our selves, as Temperance, Patience, Mortification and Self-denial : In a Word, every Thing that is done in Conformity, and upon a Principle of Obedience to any Command of God, is what I mean by a *Religious Action*. Now when any such Action as this is at any time performed ; the only Reason and Motive of him that does it, ought to be this and only this ; namely that such an Action is Pleasing to God, and

that he will therefore reward it in the Life to come.

For since whatever is the true End and Design of the whole, ought also to be the End and Design of all and every the Parts that make it up; And the whole of Religion consists in the aggregate of Religious Actions; If the End and Design of all Religion be nothing else but eternal Salvation; as has been already plainly shown; It necessarily follows that the same ought also to be the End and Design of every particular Religious Action.

But it may be objected, that God himself proposes unto us another End also of Religion, at least in *Conjunction* with that of everlasting Happiness; I mean our Welfare and Prosperity in this World, which he has been pleased to set before us, if not as a certain Reward, yet a probable one however, of true Piety. Thus the wise Man speaking of Religion under the Name of *Wisdom*, recommends it unto us by this Consideration, amongst others, that *length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour, and that her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*; Prov. 3. 16, 17. To the very same Purpose also St. Paul tells us, that *Godliness is profitable unto all things having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*, 1 Tim. 4. 8. If then a fair and reasonable Prospect even of temporal as well as eternal Good is thus set before us, the more effectually to win us over to the Practice of our Duty; why may we not make the former, as well as the later, in some measure the End and Design of our religious Actions?

In answer hereunto, I grant that whatever God has thought fit to propose or promise to us as any sort of Reward for our good Actions; as far as he has so proposed or promised such a thing, so far and no farther we may have a View or Respect unto it. Now altho' he is pleased sometimes to set before us even the good Things of this World as a Reward of Vertue, yet it is not with a Design that we should at any time make them,

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or any of them, the *End* at which we aim in any virtuous Action, but only a *Means*, the more effectually to pursue that great *End* of Salvation, which for ever ought to be before us: And however an Action may otherwise be good in it self, yet if we stop at the temporal Reward which perhaps attends it, and do not refer even that to a farther and better End, the Action it self can never be pleasing or acceptable to God.

For Example, *Honour* or Praise in the sight of Man, is a part of that temporal Encouragement which God has been pleased to propose to Religion, *Prov. 3. 16.* And if a Man so lets his *light shine before men, that they may see his good Works*, and all this is intirely referred to the glorifying of God in order to his own and other Mens Salvation, in all this he does no more than what Christ himself commands, and therefore will most certainly accept of, *Matth. 5. 16.* But when the Pharisees made this the very *End* of their good Actions, that they might be *seen of Men*, and this with no farther or better View, our blessed Saviour most plainly stiles them *Hypocrites*, and gives them to understand, that they are to expect no farther Reward from God, *Matt. 6. 1. &c.* A little to encourage our Weakness, God is pleased to allure us with a Prospect even of temporal Things; but that we may not set our Hearts upon such Trifles, we are often put in mind how little regard we ought to have unto them in comparison of the Things that are Eternal. *The kingdom of God and his righteousness are first to be sought, Matt. 6. 33.* We must not labour for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, *John 6. 27.* This is the one thing needful, *Luke 10. 42.* This is that *Treasure*, that goodly Pearl, for the Purchase of which a Man should be ready to part with all that he hath, *Matt. 13. 44. 45.*

Secondly, From what has been said it will follow, that when any one attempts to bring another over to the Profession of the true Religion, it ought to be with this, and no other Design, namely, That he may promote and put forward the Salvation of his Neighbour.

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The Pharisees indeed compassed Sea and Land to make one Profelyte to their Religion: But so far were they from helping him forward hereby in the way to Heaven, that, on the contrary, they made him *two fold more the Child of Hell than themselves*, Matt. 23. 15. And by the ways that many have taken to make Converts, or rather Hypocrites, it seems to be too too evident, that their Design has been more to advance and strengthen a Party in this World, than to save the Souls of Men in the next. But if we are in Conscience bound to love our Neighbour with the very same sort and sincerity of Affection (tho' not the same Degree of it) wherewith we love our selves (Matth. 22. 39.) Then as our everlasting Happiness ought to be the great and only End and Design of our own Religion, so are we obliged to have the same thing for our Neighbour alone in our view, whenever we endeavour or make any Attempt to convert him from the Error of his Way, Jam. 5. 19. 20.

And if this plain Truth is once admitted, the Consequence will be, that whosoever at any time argues or disputes in defence of Religion, is bound to do it with all the calmness and gentleness that possibly he can. Sharpness and Anger, Heat and Violence, do commonly raise Mens Passions, and thereby obstruct their Reason, so as to make them much less capable than otherwise they would be of a clear and solid Conviction: But Meekness and great Calmness in the Management of a Religious Dispute, as it is a great Argument of Charity, and a true Christian Concern for the Souls of Men, so does it very much incline an Adversary with Patience and Attention to hearken to whatever is offered unto him, and helps to keep him in a right Disposition for the reception of every Truth that appears to be any way necessary, or even profitable, in order to his Salvation. And therefore not only they whose Profession and Business it is to teach Religion, but every one also who, upon any occasion, appears in the Defence of it, ought for ever to have those remarkable words of St. Paul most deeply impressed upon his Heart,

2 Tim.

Tim. 2. 24, 25. *The Servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all Men, apt to Teach, Patient ; in Meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them Repentance to the acknowledging of the Truth, &c.* Thus did Christ Jesus, the Son of God, himself both Teach and Preach the Gospel whilst he was upon the Earth : The abominable Wickedness and Hypocrisy of the hard-hearted Pharisees he sometimes indeed rebuked with Sharpness, but always with the greatest Gravity and Seriousness : But in all other his publick Sermons and private Discourses nothing appears but the most rational and holy Doctrine delivered with all imaginable Temper and Sweetness. And no doubt but the mighty Progress that Christianity soon after made in the World, was in a great measure owing to the same way of Teaching, that was used by the Apostles and first Preachers of it. But in Process of Time, when Men began to mix their Passions with their Religion ; and this Weakness of Nature prevailed too much even upon many of those who stood up in Defence of the Truth ; The Consequence was, that Men seemed to take Delight in opposing one anothers, and often mistook each other's Meaning ; whereby the Christian Church came to be so rent and divided into Sects and Parties, as (without the extraordinary Goodness and Mercy of God do interpose) to give us very little hope of its ever being again restored to that Union which once it so happily enjoyed.

Thirdly, From what has been said it will also follow, That nothing ought to be received as a *part of Religion*, but what is necessary to Salvation.

For the better understanding of this Inference, we must take notice of a plain and rational Distinction between a *Part of Religion* and a *Circumstance* of it. When any thing is so taken into the Body of Religion, as to be look'd upon as perpetual and unchangeable ; This is what we reckon to be a *Part* of it. On the contrary ; However a thing may by Law or Custom be ordinarily or constantly joined with any Religious

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Performance ; yet if the same be reputed to be changeable and separable from the Performance it self ; and may by any Authority, less than that of God, be accordingly so changed and separated ; such a Thing, whatever it may be ; with respect to Religion, is no more but a *Circumstance* and not a *Part* of it. I know not better how to illustrate this than by a Similitude drawn from a Man and his Garments. All the Vitals and every Limb of a Man's Body is a Part of him ; Take away his Vitals, and you destroy his Being ; Take away a Limb from him, and you Lame or Maim him ; Or add a Limb to him (if the Thing were possible) and you make him a Monster : But as for the Cloaths he wears, they may be altered or changed, as the Season of the Year, the Custom of the Place, or any other Rule which in such Cases is to be observed shall direct, without any Damage done to the Man himself. In like manner ; To Love God, to Fear, Worship and Serve him ; To be Just, True, Peaceable, Humble, Charitable, Sober and Temperate ; To be received into the Church by Baptism, and after that to partake often of the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ ; These I say, and every other Thing which the Law of God himself requires, are always to be reputed as *Parts* of Religion ; and, as such, to be perpetual and unalterable. But the particular Hour when a Congregation should meet to Worship God ; the Place where they should Assemble ; the particular Form of Words in which they should offer up their Devotions, and the Posture of Body which upon that occasion they should observe ; These and such like Things as these, as by lawful Authority they are or may be appointed and settled for the sake of Decency and Order ; so being subject by the same Authority to be changed or altered, if there be a just Reason for it ; they are ever to be reputed and look'd upon in themselves not as the *Parts* of Religion, but as the Modes and *Circumstances* ; or (as I may so speak) as the Dress or Garb of it.

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And this Distinction being thus premised, the Truth of the Inference which I have but now laid down, will not stand in need of very much Proof. For since the End and Design of every part of a Thing ought always to be the same with that of the Whole, and the true design of Religion is and ought to be nothing else but eternal Salvation; It follows that whatever is unnecessary in order to this End, ought never to be received or owned as a *Part* of Religion.

Upon this Principle thus established, even tho' we had no other Ground to go upon, we might very justly reject a great many of those Inventions which the Church of *Rome* has not only established within herself, but would impose upon all others. That Church has adopted sundry Things into the very Body of her Religion, and as *Parts* of it, that never were delivered down by Christ or his Apostles: Such as Praying to Saints, Worshipping of Images, Transubstantiation, Worshipping of the Host, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Purgatory, Prayers and Masses for the Dead, the Pope's Supremacy, and their Church's Infallibility. These Things, I say, they Teach and Practice, as being (all of them now) perpetual, and for ever to be kept up in the Christian Church; and consequently with them they are no less than *Parts* of Religion.

Now altho' we have abundant Arguments to prove all these fore-named Particulars to be false, and some of them to be Unlawful and Wicked; yet supposing all this to be laid aside, it were Ground sufficient for us to reject them (even tho' we had no other Objection to them, as we have many) that they would impose them upon us as no less than *Parts* of the Christian Religion. For as nothing is to be received as a *Part* of Religion, but what is necessary to Salvation, so all these Things which I have named (even supposing they were Lawful, which they are very far from, yet) are manifestly at least unnecessary in order to this End. For nothing can be necessary to Salvation, but what God has commanded; and all his Commands are, either

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Expresly, or by Consequence, contained in the Holy Scriptures: Let them be searched then from the beginning to the ending; and so far are they from the least Suggestion of any of these Things, as commanded by God; that, on the contrary, they are wholly silent concerning them all, except it be that some of them are therein very manifestly forbidden. If we had no more then to say against these Innovations of the Roman Church (as indeed we have a great deal) yet this alone would be Ground enough for us, to Reject them, namely, because they would put them upon us as *Parts of Religion*, and yet they are manifestly not necessary to Salvation.

But they who dissent from our established Church, do endeavour to turn this very Argument upon us; and as we reject the Impositions of the Church of *Rome*, as for divers other Reasons, so for this also in particular (which even alone would be sufficient) namely, because they are not necessary to Salvation; so do they sometimes allege, that they have the same Ground to refuse the Cross after Baptism, kneeling at the Holy Communion, wearing of a Surplice in the Performance of Divine Service, the Use of the Ring in Matrimony, and the rest of our Ceremonies; even because it is on both sides confessed, that these things are in their Nature indifferent, and tho' not forbidden by God, yet not made necessary by any Command or Appointment of his.

But the insufficiency of this Argument as levelled against us, will immediately appear, if it be considered that our Church never had the least Thought of imposing her Ceremonies as *Parts of Religion*, but only as *Circumstances of it*, † and things in their Nature alterable by the same Authority that imposed them. Now altho it is most true, that we ought not to receive any thing

† Every particular or national Church hath Authority to ordain, change and abolish Ceremonies or Rites of the Church, or dain'd only by Man's Authority, so that all things be done to edifying. Art. 34.

is a *part of Religion*, if it be not necessary to Salvation ; yet it will not in the least follow, but that lawful Authority may in many cases, for Order sake, and to avoid Confusion, prescribe and determine the Modes and *Circumstances* (which are things very different from the *Parts*) of it, and that we may be obliged to yield Obedience and be conformable to such Determination.

The Fourth and last Inference which I shall draw from what has been said is this, That all Questions and Disputes concerning such things as are no way necessary to Salvation, ought, as much as is possible, to be avoided and excluded from Religion.

What vast and numberless Volumes of religious Controversies have been published, even to the Disturbance and Distraction of the World ? But if all such Writers had seriously put this Question upon every Point which they handled, Is this necessary to Salvation ? and is this necessary to Salvation ? both the Number and Bulk of such sort of Books had been brought within a very narrow compass. Indeed if Learned Men do soberly and peaceably debate even such Points as are not perhaps of any great Necessity, and give no Disturbance on this account to any one, I think they are not at all to be blamed : But if the only design of *Religion*, and of every *part* of it, be nothing else but the Salvation of Man, whatever Questions or Disputations are of no Importance towards this great End, ought not at all to be intermixed with it.

Hear what St. Paul says touching this matter, *Titus* 3. 8. 9. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that*

The particular Forms of Divine Worship and Ceremonies appointed to be used therein, being things in their own Nature indifferent, and alterable, and so acknowledged, &c. Preface to the Book of Common Prayer.

The keeping or omitting of a Ceremony, in it self considered, is but a small thing ; yet the wilful and contemptuous Transgression and breaking of a common Order and Discipline, is no small Offence before God. Discourse of Ceremonies prefixed to the Book of Common Prayer in Quarto and Folio.

then affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God ought be careful to maintain good works: These things are good and profitable unto men. That is to say, These are the things which conduce to our Salvation. But avoid foolish Questions, and Genealogies, and Contentions, and Strivings about the Law. But why must these things be avoided? Why, because they are unprofitable and vain. That is, make nothing towards our Salvation, which is the only true End of Religion.

Hear him again yet farther, 2 Tim. 2. 22, 23. Flee youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned Questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife; and thereby do only hinder a Man in the Race that is set before him.

The ancient Poets have a Fable of *Atalanta*, whom they represent as a Virgin so swift of Foot, that no one could out-run her. One who undertook to run a Race with her, contrived the Matter so as to throw a gay golden Apple in her Way, and then a Second, and after that a Third, in the same manner; which whilst she stop to gather up, the other out-strip her, and got the Victory. In like manner, the Devil, in order to hinder us in our Christian Course, not only lays the Temptations of Pleasure and Profit in our Way; but also endeavours to raise our vain Curiosity by starting a number of subtil tho' uselefs Questions: And whilst our Minds are too much busied about these Trifles, we neglect true Faith, Piety, Charity, and other things that are of absolute necessity, in order to the making our Calling and Election sure.

I shall conclude this Discourse with the words of St. Paul, only with a small variation of the Expression. Phil. 3. 13, 14. Forgetting those things which are unnecessary, and reaching forth unto those things which are necessary, let us press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. To which Prize God of his infinite Mercy bring us all, &c.

F I N I

